

“The eighth Floor. Just after the Floor of Despair and before the Floor of Ego.” Frost soliloquized in the vacant halls of the Nexus.

The clapping of her leather soles was the only sound that echoed here. Even the patters of the Star Child and the Sleepy Frost were silenced as if they were incapable of making noise.

The Star Child was still in her white, robe-like dress. Nothing about her seemed to have changed despite having Archived the Lull-A-Goodbye. However, the darkness within the Floor was partially removed as the faint outlines of rivets filled the skies like false stars.

Clearly, the Floor of Desire was the insides of the black sphere that contained the Captured Star, the very thing that the Star Child took after. Similarly, the Sleepy Frost was also very likely a manifestation of the same thing if Lull-A-Goodbye was anything to go by.

When Frost asked the Sleepy Frost if she knew what she was, she quickly answered with:

“You. But me. I don’t have many memories aside from all the dreams I’ve experienced. That place inside of... what was it? The Floor of Desire, right? It was just like that place. But I also remember plenty of others like me.”

The Sleepy Frost was able to share her experiences but was not quite sure of it herself. She was full of doubt and her eyes were raised to the ceiling in constant self-scrutiny. Either that or she was already tired after less than an hour out of bed.

“There were others?” Frost raised a brow, the Star Child nodding as if to confirm this.

“Yeah. But I – or... well, it’s weird. It nothing like the other ‘Other’ us in the Nexus. We had white hair, just like her, and golden eyes like everyone else. People in white coats constantly watched over us. But so long as I was allowed to sleep, then I thought it was fine.”

The Star Child wore a conflicted look when she said this, but nodded, nevertheless. She drew a picture of Nav and tugged on Frost’s sleeves.

“Oh, yeah. Mhm! I guess *you* liked her. I don’t even remember that person. \*Yawn\* I just wanna sleeeeeeep already~”

“Hey, hold on. Don’t go sleeping on me now when we’re getting to the good part!” Frost snapped her fingers as the Sleepy Frost clung onto her arm like a koala. “What about the ones with the red eyes?”

“Uh... I think they were killed or something.” She yawned again, causing Frost to sigh. “From what I can remember at least. Sleeping and death. What’s the difference?”

“Now I’m starting to doubt if you’re an Alter me or not.” Frost said in a deadpan voice.

The Star Child puffed her cheeks in a pout before she weakly punched the Sleepy Frost on the shoulder. She violently shook her head, displeased by her insensitivity. It was surreal seeing the Star Child act so brazenly all of a sudden, and it was strictly towards the Sleepy Frost.

She never really took a direct approach and simply solved everything by drawing it in the air. So to see her take action took Frost by surprise.

That had her wondering as they approached the door of the Floor of Hope.

“Aren’t you both technically the same person?” She asked, looking down at the two.

Suddenly, the Sleepy Frost glared at her as if offended whereas the Star Child just shook her head again.

“Whaaat? No way. I’m more *you* than her.” The Sleepy Frost claimed.

“But she’s also more you than me.” Frost countered as they bickered at Hope’s doorstep.

“That can’t be right. You’re more me than I am her!”

“Look, I’m not the one with the ‘Alter Frost’ label slapped on me. The past me is definitely closer to her though.”

“Don’t fry my brain like this! If past you is closer to her, then present you is closer to me! You and I are like two peas in a pod! Two cuddle mates under a blanket! Two seeds in the same fruit! Two bullets in a mag!”

She clung even more tightly right as the Star Child held on to the Sleepy Frost’s back with an excited expression.

“I guess that much is true from our hair. But still, that doesn’t change that the Star Child is...” Frost unexpectedly trailed off. “Wait, are you really ‘me’ in the first place?”

The distinction between each doppelganger was not so clear. However, she figured that the Star Child was closer to the Captured Star than Frost’s own identity was. The Sleepy Frost was certainly just a lazy ‘reskin’ of her with the added bonus of being able to talk.

*Is the Sleepy Frost the me that managed to escape or the one that’s still stuck in a dream?*

*“She could also be a pure manifestation of just you and dreams. Nothing more, nothing less.”*

*I forgot the answer doesn’t have to be so complicated. Just like the Innocent. Although now that I think about it... isn’t the Innocent just the same thing?*

*“Do you enjoy poking holes in things? Do you like finding unneeded flaws in a story?”*

Nav scolded.

*In this case? Yeah, let me critique everything because this is confusing the hell out of me. I guess it CAN be as simple as that. The Star Child is the closest to the Captured Star anyway. And that goes back to the notion of desire. If Lull-A-Goodbye is something to go by, then it started with a dream about a world outside of the black egg.*

Frost stared into the eyes of the Star Child, just wondering what was in her mind. There were things that even the Sleepy Frost could not translate. Those golden eyes were as extraordinary as ever. Anything that was even loosely related to the Captured Star had golden eyes as proof of their bizarre heritage.

Though calling it as such was probably incorrect.

Because the past Arbiter has the same golden eyes, as did Lailah. But she was still uncertain if Lailah was really created before the inception of the Captured Star, during, or after.

*“You’re forgetting one more thing.”*

*Hmm?*

*“Lailah. What were her desires in that moment? Was it freedom? Or was it the longing of losing a friend over and over again?”*

It was difficult to say, but Nav was on the right path. The Book of Dreaming Mortality could go both ways between the Captured Star and Lailah. Both had their own interpretations of who the tale closely followed.

But in truth, it was almost certain that it simply followed both equally, just like Anna and Cinder in the Book of Civitas Cinder. Frost habitually overthought things, so Occam’s Razor helped spare her this time.

Soon, the doors of the Floor of Hope creaked open inwards, revealing a bright, golden light that beckoned them to enter. It was warmer than sunshine, the rays casting away her worries behind in the cold air of the pale Nexus as they entered a world unlike any other.

“Greetings esteemed guests!” A voice called from within the light as it steadily faded. The silhouettes of mountains filled an endless expanse. “Welcome to the oh so benevolent Floor of Hope!”

Golden buildings stood further into the distance, illuminating the world as the abstract light faded, leaving them in a dim world where no stars shone in the sky. Those buildings were beacons, and the mountains held what looked like artificial stars atop their summit.

The expanse was a sandy wasteland where little vegetation grew. Ruins sat beneath those towering buildings. It was nothing like Frost expected it to be. She envisioned the Floor of Hope to be a magical place of gold.

Yet what surrounded her was more fitting to be in the Floor of Despair.

“I agree with that sentiment, my Amalgam friend. This is admittedly less hospitable than I imagined it to be. Let’s not speculate just yet! Let’s get comfortable with each other’s presence first!”

He noticed the confusion written on her face as he approached them from the base of a large, sandy dune. A cold breeze swept across the desolate lands, carrying waste into the air as the belongings of the dead rolled in the sand like tumbleweed.

Then, with his diamond-encrusted cane in hand, and his top hat in another – he finally stood before them with open arms, welcoming them to his desolate abode.